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Talking Tough to Moscow

Carter emphasizes U.S. strength—and offers an olive branch

Moscow was angry, and the transatlantic rhetoric was rising to "chilly war" level. White House aides had privately suggested that Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had lied to the President. Washington's allies were wondering just who was speaking for the Administration. Was it National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who seemed willing to match the Soviets decibel for decibel? Or was it softer-spoken Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, ever the conciliator? Unmistakably, it was time for Carter himself to speak up and clear the air.

Last week the President did so. Addressing a graduation class at his alma mater, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Carter talked straight to Moscow in some of the harshest words used by a U.S. President since John Kennedy in 1961 charged the Soviet character with being "stamped for all time on the bloody streets of Budapest." At the same time, he offered the Russians an olive branch of potential good will from the U.S. side, if only they would make the right decision. "The Soviet Union can choose either confrontation or cooperation," said Carter at the climax of his speech, adding soberly, "the United States is adequately prepared to meet either choice."

Some of Carter's bluntest phrases were directed at Moscow's repressive treatment of internal dissent. Clearly referring to the seven-year sentence recently imposed on Helsinki Human Rights Monitor Yuri Orlov, Carter declared that the Soviets' abuse of such rights had earned them "the condemnation of people everywhere who love freedom." "By their actions," Carter added, "they have demonstrated that the Soviet system cannot tolerate freely expressed ideas, notions of loyal opposition and the free movement of peoples. The Soviet Union attempts to export a totalitarian and repressive form of government, resulting in a closed society."

Carter reaffirmed his Administration's own commitment to human rights and extolled the U.S. philosophy "based on personal freedom, the most powerful of all ideas." In a cutting dig, Carter noted that "even Marxist-Leninist groups no



Carter speaking at Annapolis

viet Union as a model to be imitated."

Carter also emphasized U.S. economic and military strength. Still, he left open to the Kremlin the door to mutual cooperation. He reaffirmed détente as "central to world peace," but added that it must be "reciprocal." The President offered Moscow a wide variety of potential areas for working together with the U.S., ranging from joint solution of political problems in Rhodesia, Namibia, even Ethiopia, to further development of trade, cultural and scientific exchanges. Even the prospects for a SALT II agreement, noted Carter in an upbeat section of his speech, were "good."

Moscow's reaction to Carter's address was no more acrimonious than could be expected. His words, observed Tass with pique, were "strange, to say the least." Moscow scored his criticism of the Soviet system as "inventions, which are standard for present American propaganda." At the same time, the Soviets were showing their disdain for foreign criticism. Even as Carter was speaking, a prominent Moscow dissident, Electrical Communications Engineer Vladimir Slepak, 50, was under arrest on charges of "malicious hooliganism." Slepak had applied without

success a dozen times since 1970 to emigrate to Israel; in final desperation he had demonstrated publicly from the balcony of his Moscow apartment. At week's end there was indication that the Soviets might soon bring imprisoned Dissidents Alexander Ginzburg and Anatoli Shcharansky to trial.

Carter's firmness was greeted with approval, and some relief, by key Western European governments, which have been seeking a more positive token of leadership from Washington. Said a senior British official: "In essence, the President's description of the state of American-Soviet and East-West relations is very much as we see it."

In Paris, where five NATO allies met last week to work out plans for helping Zaïre, the response was favorable. French officials were happy that Washington shared their growing sense of unease at the African policy of Moscow and its Cuban client. Even West German officials, who have in the past taken a more



A relaxed President reaches for a Frisbee

Admirals prepared to meet confrontation or cooperation.